

SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-1154  
SHIRLEY SEALY/NPC

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"KING" THE TV SERIES

ANNCR:

JUST OVER ONE YEAR AGO, MILLIONS OF AMERICAN TELEVISION VIEWERS WERE ENTHRALLED BY THE EIGHT-PART FILM PRESENTATION OF "ROOTS" -- WHICH TRACED THE HISTORY OF AN AMERICAN BLACK FAMILY THROUGH THE DAYS OF SLAVERY UNTIL THE END OF THE LAST CENTURY. A NEW AND EAGERLY-AWAITED TV SERIES CONCERNS A MUCH SHORTER AND MUCH MORE RECENT PERIOD OF BLACK HISTORY. FROM VOA'S SHIRLY SEALY, HERE IS A REPORT ON THE TV SERIES CALLED "KING." WHICH WILL BE (WAS) PRESENTED ON 3 CONSECUTIVE EVENINGS BY NBC-TV, BEGINNING SUNDAY, FEBRUARY TWELFTH.

VOICE:

AMERICAN TELEVISION HAS INVENTED A NEW FORM OF FILM ENTERTAINMENT CALLED A "DOCU-DRAMA." IT'S A PRESENTATION THAT IS PART DOCUMENTARY -- SHOWING REAL PEOPLE INVOLVED IN REAL EVENTS -- AND PART DRAMATIC INVENTION, USING ACTORS AND A SCRIPT TO RE-CREATE REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS.

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL DOCU-DRAMAS TO DATE IS THE LIFE OF THE LATE DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER KING. THE THREE-PART, SIX-HOUR DRAMA COVERS BOTH DOCTOR KING'S TRIUMPHS AS WELL AS HIS DEFEATS -- IN PRIVATE AND IN PUBLIC -- DURING THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE. IT BEGINS IN THE EARLY NINETEEN FIFTIES WHEN HE LED THE HISTORIC CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES IN ALABAMA AND CONTINUES INTO THE NINETEEN SIXTIES WHEN HE WAS RECOGNIZED AROUND THE WORLD AS ONE OF THIS NATION'S MOST POWERFUL AND RESPECTED BLACK LEADERS -- IN BOTH THE SPIRITUAL AND POLITICAL SENSE.

SCREENWRITER ABBY MANN, WHO ALSO DIRECTED, PULLS NO PUNCHES IN THE SCRIPT FOR "KING." FOR EXAMPLE, THE SERIES DEALS FRANKLY WITH DOCTOR KING'S TROUBLES WITH THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION REVEALING HOW FEDERAL AGENTS DISRUPTED CIVIL RIGHTS DEMONSTRATIONS

AND EVEN PRIDE INTO KING'S PRIVATE LIFE. RECENT NEWS REPORTS HAVE DISCLOSED SOME OF THESE QUESTIONABLE ACTIVITIES BY THE F-B-I DURING THE POLITICALLY TURBULENT NINETEEN SIXTIES. STILL, THE AGENCY'S HARASSMENT OF DOCTOR KING MAY COME AS A SHOCK TO MANY PEOPLE AS THEY WATCH THE "KING" SERIES.

AND, OF COURSE, MANY VIEWERS MUST ONCE AGAIN EXPFRIENCE THE SHOCK THEY FELT THAT APRIL DAY IN NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT, WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING WAS SHOT DOWN BY AN ASSASSIN. PAUL WINFIELD, THE ACTOR CHOSEN TO PORTRAY MARTIN LUTHER KING, SAYS THAT, EMOTIONALLY, RE-ENACTING THAT MOMENT WAS ALMOST MORE THAN HE AND OTHER ACTORS COULD BEAR. THE SENSE OF REALITY THAT COMES THROUGH IN THE TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF DOCTOR KING'S LIFE IS PARTLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT MANY SCENES ARE TAKEN FROM ACTUAL NEWS FILMS OF REAL EVENTS -- THE CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES IN SELMA AND MONTGOMERY IN ALABAMA AND THE CROWDS THAT FOLLOWED KING IN CHICAGO AND WASHINGTON. SEEING THESE EVENTS ON TELEVISION AT THE TIME DID MUCH TO HELP SHAPE A NEW AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND BRING ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CLIMATE THAT EXISTS TODAY IN THIS COUNTRY.

IN ADDITION TO PAUL WINFIELD, THE EXCELLENT CAST IN THE "KING" TELEVISION SERIES INCLUDES CICELY TYSON AS DOCTOR KING'S WIFE, CORRETTA, AND HOWARD ROLLINS PORTRAYING ANDREW YOUNG. MISTER YOUNG WHO IS NOW THE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS, WAS AN EARLY FRIEND AND SUPPORTER OF MARTIN LUTHER KING.

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